Louisiana and Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, and senators from the right, including Republicans Roy Blunt of Missouri, Pat Roberts of Kansas and John Thune of South Dakota, are, for example, co-sponsors of the Promotion and Expansion of Private Employee Ownership Act of 2013.

As far back as 1974, Ronald Reagan, then governor of California, strongly endorsed the concept, telling Young Americans for Freedom that ''capitalism can work to make everybody a 'have.' '' In an analysis reminiscent of Russell Long's, Reagan said:

''Income, you know, results from only two things. It can result from capital or it can result from labor. If the worker begins getting his income from both sources at once, he has a real stake in increasing production and increasing output. One such plan is based on financing future expansion in such a way as to create stock ownership for employees. It does not reduce the holdings of the present owners, nor does it require the employees to divert their own savings into stock purchases.''

Second, Blasi, Freeman and Kruse point out that there are already extensive mechanisms in place for employee ownership, not only formal ESOPs but also a variety of profit-sharing plans. Because of this, they argue, major innovations are unlikely to be needed; improvements in existing laws and practices should suffice.

The authors cite responses to a question on employee ownership asked in a 2006 General Social Survey. The survey found that 47 percent of private-sector, full-time wage and salary workers now have access to some form of sharing in the firm where they work—cash profit sharing, cash gain sharing, employee stock ownership, employee stock options or ESOPs.

Third, and most important, is the authors' claim that it is economically advantageous to give employees an ownership stake in the firm for which they work. Blasi, Freeman and Kruse provide evidence that employees with some form of worker ownership accumulate more savings than employees in nonparticipating firms and that firms with some form of capital sharing perform better in the competitive marketplace than those that do not.

They write that ''workers with profit sharing or employee stock ownership are higher paid and have more benefits than other workers. This means that the substantial profit sharing and gain sharing and ownership stakes for the typical worker in these plans tend to come on top of, not in place of, fair fixed wages and benefits.''

In addition, the authors cite studies showing sharp increases in productivity, higher employee morale, lessened turnover and fewer bankruptcies in corporations that adopt ESOPs.

These findings raise a series of questions.

If the various forms of worker capitalism or profit sharing produce such benefits, why hasn't the free market itself forced every company to adopt similar plans?

Asked about worker ownership, Robert Frank, an economist at Cornell and a specialist on issues concerning inequality, wrote in an email that he is ''skeptical,'' and cites his analysis of employee ownership in his book, ''The Darwinian Economy,'' in which he argues that if a worker-owned firm has all the advantages its proponents claim:

''It would enjoy a prodigious competitive advantage. Since wages account for about 70 percent of a typical firm's total cost, increasing productivity by 15 percent would reduce total cost by more than 10 percent. The firm could cut its prices by almost that amount and still remain profitable, which would enable it to peel off most of its rivals' customers.''

Frank pointed out that ''any firm that enjoyed these advantages should sweep the market like a prairie fire, reaping enormous profits in the process.''

Freeman addressed this question in a series of email exchanges with me. He began by noting that there is management opposition to profit sharing with rank and file employees ''because the people who control the firm may have to take lower profits—if I am in charge of the firm and sharing profits with you raises productivity, but it means that I take less in profits, I will not favor going to a more shared system.''

In addition, Freeman argued, ''magnitudes are important.'' The gains from employee share programs are modest, a ''productivity edge of about 2 percent or so on average,'' which may be trumped by other marketplace factors, including ''some small monopoly advantage'' held by competitors.

Freeman emphasized that many liberal-left economists and policy makers are locked into the view that labor and capital are intractably adversarial. Consequently they ''favor a European style big government/strong union solution to inequality'' rather than solutions of a more cooperative nature such as ESOPs.

Blasi, in a more detailed response, emailed that ''both Democrats and Republicans until recently really believed that inflation-adjusted wage income growth or lowering taxes alone could maintain and grow the middle class.'' In fact, Blasi argues, changing economic conditions dictate that ''the sustaining of a middle class and mobility requires a capital ownership and a capital income policy.''

In addition, Blasi writes, the ''economic share policy tradition in American history has been sidelined by scholars in the modern and post-modern era. Until now, if you argued for ESOPs you were using 'small ball' ideas.''

Liberal opposition to ESOPs is based in part on the view that the program amounts to a collection of tax subsidies for corporations and the wealthy. The tax breaks for ESOPs originally included a tax credit for company contributions: a deferral of taxes on shareholders who sell stock to an ESOP; deductibility of corporate dividends on ESOP-held shares; the exclusion from tax liability of 50 percent of the interest income from loans to an ESOP; and a 50 percent estate tax exclusion on the gain from the sale of shares to an ESOP.

Blasi, Freeman and Kruse acknowledge that some critics see ESOPs as pioneering ''a form of special-interest tax incentives from the Treasury.'' Their counterargument: ''We see the ESOP as the continuation of the Founders' desire to reduce inequality and preserve democratic practices by extending property ownership to more Americans.''

The Blasi-Freeman-Kruse proposal has the crucial political advantage of appealing to some on the political right because it would, in fact, make employee share programs more attractive by boosting tax subsidies—a form of cutting taxes.

Most significantly, the Blasi-Freeman-Kruse proposal stands apart from alternate policy initiatives designed to address growing inequality because it directly addresses the concentration of wealth and political power at the top.

For that reason alone, the idea of expanding employee ownership deserves serious consideration. The proposal does not resolve the question of how to give workers a sufficiently large share of capital to materially impact their economic status. Still, there are not that many viable options available to those who are committed to improving the disadvantaged position of labor versus capital. Politicians and policy makers cannot afford to disregard a proposal with demonstrable potential.

DOWN EAST MAGAZINE 60TH ANNIVERSARY

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I rise today to recognize the 60th anniversary of Down East: The Magazine of Maine. From the inaugural August, 1954, edition of 5,000 copies assembled around a kitchen table in Camden, ME, Down East has grown to become one of America's most successful regional publications with a circulation that exceeds 90,000 and a devoted readership of people around the country who love the beauty and culture of the State of Maine.

Down East was founded by Duane Doolittle, a native Mainer who left a secure teaching position at Syracuse University at the age of 42 to return home in pursuit of his dream to publish a magazine dedicated to, as he wrote in his first message to readers, ''honestly reflecting the beauty, the spirit, the unique and special qualities that make this corner of the world like no other place under the sun.'' For six decades, that statement of purpose has been fulfilled by talented photographers and engaging writers, today under the leadership of publisher Bob Fernald.

The name of the magazine was taken from the historic practice of sailing downwind to head east along the coast of Maine, and Down East continues to celebrate the heritage of Maine. At the same time, the magazine has expanded its scope to cover with expertise and insight contemporary trends in the arts, food, fashion, business, and politics. In addition to its award-winning print publication, Down East has a strong digital presence with a global readership of more than 900,000 and a popular interactive kiosk at the Portland Jetport that offers the best in Maine-made products.

Down East goes beyond recording life in Maine to enhancing it. From charities and land conservation to the arts and festivals, the company is a generous supporter of efforts that strengthen our communities.

Capturing the essence of Maine in print is no easy task. Duane Doolittle put it this way: ''To attempt to crack the mystery of what those things are that make a Downeaster different from a Texan or a Hoosier would be as unavailing as pondering the imponderables. All we can honestly say is that we are tuned to this particular parcel of earth and we like its music.''

That mystery may never be cracked, but for 60 years Down East: The Magazine of Maine has made the attempt entertaining and enlightening. I congratulate the leadership and staff of Down East on this milestone anniversary and wish them continued success for years to come.

RECOGNIZING MARY ''MICKEY'' THOMAN

Mr. ENZI. Madam President, I appreciate having this opportunity to share